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Common Core State Standards FAQ's

What are the Common Core State Standards? The CCSS are a set of internationally benchmarked K-12 educational standards to ensure every student's college and career readiness in English language arts and mathematics. These standards increase rigor in every school, and provide clarity and consistency for what all students need to know once they graduate from high school. To date, 45 states, the District of Columbia, Guam, American Samoan Islands, U.S. Virgin Islands and the Anchorage, AK School District have voluntarily adopted CCSS.

What was the process for developing and writing the Standards? In 2009, 48 states, the District of Columbia and two U.S. territories voluntarily committed to collaborate on the development of common English language arts and mathematics standards aligned with the expectations of postsecondary job training programs and credit-bearing, entry-level courses in two and four year colleges. The Common Core State Standards were written and published in 2010 by The National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), in collaboration with educational organizations, teachers, researchers, higher learning experts and business leaders from across the country.

The Standards are divided into two categories:

- K-12 standards that outline the grade-by-grade expectations for student learning and results in students prepared for college or career; and
- College and career readiness standards, which address what students are expected to know when they enter college, technical school or career.

The process was thoughtful and transparent, and ensured that the Standards:

- Were based on state and international student learning standards with the best outcomes, and the expectations of postsecondary job training programs and credit-bearing, entry level courses in two and four year colleges.
- Utilized the experience of teachers, the higher learning and business communities, content experts, and leading education researchers; and
- Incorporated feedback from the public.

The Standards development timeline included:

- College and career ready graduation standards released for public comment in September 2009;
- K-12 standards released for public comment in March 2010. More than 10,000 comments were received and reviewed by an advisory group of education, college and state policy administrators and experts; and
- Final K-12 standards released in June 2010.

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Who is leading the initiative? The CCSS initiative is led by States, with coordination from the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers. The federal government has not been involved in initiating or developing the CCSS. Other supporting partners include National PTA; the National Association of State Boards of Education; the Alliance for Excellent Education; the American Association of School Administrators; The James B. Hunt, Jr. Institute; the Business Roundtable, Achieve; ACT; and the College Board.

How were standards set in the past? In 2002, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) mandated that every state implement a standards-based accountability system designed to ensure that all students would become proficient—as defined by the state—in reading and English language arts and mathematics by the 2013-14 school year. Every state has its own method for setting standards. Some states adopt standards through the Department of Education, while others adopt them through the State Legislature. NCLB did not address specific levels of rigor, so state standards were vastly different across the country. This has caused a patchwork system of standards that has proven to be detrimental within the United States' mobile society. As a result, quality education depended on zip code, prompting the development of the CCSS.

Have the Standards been field-tested or are they evidence-based? The CCSS has a solid foundation. They were developed from the best standards in the country, the highest international standards, and evidence and expertise about educational outcomes. The Standards build on the most advanced thinking in preparing all students for success in college and career. This means the CCSS will take even the best state standards to the next level.

Is this essentially a government takeover of education because of the Race to the Top grant requirements? No. States and Districts who applied for Race to the Top funds were not required to adopt CCSS. States and districts who applied for Race to the Top funds were required to adopt college and career-ready standards and assess students based on those standards. The rationale behind adopting college and career-ready standards is based on evidence that the United States is not adequately or consistently preparing students for either college or career.

Is the federal government compiling student and family data into a federal database? No. Common Core is not a mechanism for federal data collection. Confusion over data collection likely comes from a misunderstanding of the National Education Data Model (NEDM), which is actually a framework describing the types of data that individual districts and states may choose to use to answer their own questions about policy. The NEDM does not contain any data, and there are no data collection requirements for the Standards. Federal law prohibits the reporting of aggregate data that could identify individual students. In addition, the federal government does not have access to the student-level information held in state databases.

Does National PTA have a position statement or resolution that supports the CCSSI? Yes. National PTA volunteers have adopted several position statements and resolutions, beginning in 1981, in support of voluntary, clearer, higher academic standards for all students. You can read these documents on our website at PTA.org/resolutions.

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What Does This Mean for Students, Teachers and Schools?

Why are the Standards important for students, teachers and parents? Education standards and level of rigor in instruction are often complicated and vary from state to state, which can be overwhelming for teachers to implement in the classroom. In addition, parents find it difficult to support their child's learning at home. The new Common Core State Standards ensure that teachers and parents know the exact end goal and can help each student meet that goal in the classroom and at home.

Prior to Common Core, students received a variable quality of education depending on their zip code, which is problematic given the high mobility of families, especially military families. College and career-ready standards are critical because, even in high-performing states, some students are passing all required tests and graduating, yet still require remediation in their postsecondary work. Every student needs rigorous academics to ensure U.S. graduates remain globally competitive.

How much will this cost my state and school district? Exact costs will vary by state and district. There are different costs associated with adopting, implementing and assessing the Common Core State Standards, as well as providing professional development for teachers to understand the Standards, depending on what each state and district is already investing in this effort. None of these costs are new—schools, districts and states have always spent money on updating professional development, curriculum and assessments.

The creation of curriculum may cost some schools or districts more money, however since states are using the same standards, the opportunity to share best practices and curriculum will save money over time. In addition, assessments always cost money, but many states are finding that the new assessments will actually be more cost-effective than those currently used.

If the standards are raised, is it likely that students will drop out of school? This is a common concern of parents and educators. Data does not support this idea and actually shows the opposite—when more is expected of students, they rise to the challenge. In a survey of high school dropouts, two thirds report that they would have worked harder if more was demanded of them (such as higher academic standards or more studying and homework). When asked about what would improve their schools, 91% of high school students reported that providing opportunities to take courses that are more challenging would be an improvement.

Does the CCSS create unrealistically high expectations that would penalize students in low-performing schools? No. The goal of the CCSS is to ensure high expectations and an excellent education for all students, regardless of where they live. Too often, students in low-performing schools are held to lower expectations than their peers in higher performing districts. The CCSS aim to improve outcomes for students in low-performing schools by preparing students with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in college and career, and to compete not only with their peers in the next state, but also with students from around the world.

Are the Standards a new national curriculum? Do they remove local and state authority, or tell teachers what to teach? No. The Common Core State Standards do not dictate the details of academic curriculum; they only provide clear expectations for what each student must know to leave school prepared for college and career.

Curriculum is a broad term that encompasses everything a teacher uses in the classroom from lesson plans to activities, to reading and math units. In most school districts, curriculum is determined at the local level. The CCSS only set the goal; they do not tell teachers how to achieve the goal, but they will allow teachers to share best practices from state to state.

Do the Standards remove fiction and literature? Why do science teachers have to teach reading? The Standards do not remove fiction and literature from schools. The intent of the Standards is to increase the reading level of students to what they will experience in college and career. The 2009 NAEP findings agree that students need to be exposed to both literature (*Charlotte's Web*) and informational text (*Diary of Anne Frank*) in order to be college and career ready. NAEP suggested the following breakdown for literary and informational text:

Grade	Literary	Informational
4	50%	50%
8	45%	55%
12	30%	70%

English and math skills are required in all classes, not just English and math; therefore, teachers of all subjects play a role in the English language arts (ELA) and math proficiency of students. History teachers depend on students' ability to read history books and science teachers need students to be able to understand basic math in order to learn how to navigate scientific formulas.

Do the math standards cover all key math topics in the proper sequence? The challenge with having 50 different sets of standards is states cover different topics and different grade levels, especially in math. The Standards have created a coherent math progression that gets students to a final college and career ready point after 12th grade and there is flexibility to allow advanced students to study harder topics earlier, such as algebra in 8th grade. Implementation of the CCSS and new curriculum will adjust for differences among the states.

What do the Standards mean for students with disabilities and English Language Learners (ELL)? The CCSS applies to all students in school, including students with disabilities and who are ELL. The Standards recognize that implementation requires providing these students with a range of needed supports, including:

- Support and related services designed to meet students' unique needs and enable their access to the general education curriculum;

- Teachers and specialized instructional support staff who are prepared and qualified to deliver high-quality, evidence-based, individualized instruction and support services;

- Assistive technology devices that enable access to the Standards; and
- Additional time, appropriate support, and aligned assessments as ELL students acquire both English language proficiency and content area knowledge.

The CCSS Assessments

Will new standards mean more testing? Will common assessments be developed? As states implement new college and career-ready standards, they will also transition to new assessments designed to better measure if students are on track for college and career readiness. As part of the process, two consortia of states are developing common assessment processes and tools—the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC). The new tests will replace old state testing—not add to it—and for the first time, comparable achievement information will be available from state to state.

Will test scores drop? This is a new system with a new way of scoring; therefore, it is not possible to compare the new scores directly with the old state assessment scores. What is important is that the higher standards are measured with better tests. Because the rigor is higher, it may appear that scores have temporarily dropped. If this does happen, it does not mean a student is performing worse on the new tests. Educators expect this short-term decline to improve as teachers and students become more familiar with the Standards and better equipped to meet the challenges they present.

How will students, teachers and schools measure success and conduct accountability? Some states have joined Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers or the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium to help create new methods to assess the Standards. Every state will develop CCSS assessment methods as they see fit, and to determine their own accountability models, including guidelines for "making scores count" for students, teachers and schools.

National PTA is creating assessment and accountability guides for each state so parents will know how their state will be handling assessments. In the interim, parents are encouraged to work with teachers, administrators and school boards to determine what is the best method for assessing students, determining accountability and evaluating student growth and teacher performance.

Does my school have adequate technology to conduct the new assessments? The biggest hurdle that some schools will face is acquiring adequate technology and bandwidth to accommodate the new electronic testing. States still have five years to make this transition, as assessments will be available in the traditional "paper and pencil" format for three years following implementation in the 2014-15 school year. According to experts, an average middle school can successfully conduct electronic assessments with one lab containing 30 computers.